

Message Text

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ACTION EA-10

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AMEMBASSY MANILA

AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH

AMEMBASSY RANGOON

AMEMBASSY SAIGON

AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

CINCPAC HONOLULU HI

AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI

AMCONSUL UDORN

DIA WASHDC

AMCONSUL SONGKHLA UNN

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 BANGKOK 0651

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, TH

SUBJECT: THE IMPACT OF THE THANOM VISIT

REF: BANGKOK 20121

BEGIN SUMMARY: FORMER PRIME MINISTER THANOM KITTIKACHON'S
BRIEF RETURN TO THAILAND (REFTEL) DRAMATIZED CLEARLY TO
STUDENT AND POLITICAL ACTIVISTS THAT THE "REVOLUTION"
CONTINUES AGAINST THE OLD POLITICAL PROCESS AND COLLEAGUES
OF THANOM, PRAPHAT CHARUSATHIAN, AND NARONG KITTIKACHON. IT
SERVED TO RALLY STUDENT POWER EVEN AS IT EXPOSED BASIC
DIFFERENCES BETWEEN CERTAIN STUDENT AND ACTIVIST FORCES.

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THANOM'S RETURN HAS ALSO BECOME AN ELECTION CAMPAIGN

ISSUE ITSELF, AND MAY AFFECT THE PROSPECTS OF CERTAIN CANDIDATES WHO WERE ALLIED WITH HIM VIA THE FORMER REGIME'S UNITED THAI PEOPLE'S PARTY (UTPP). FINALLY, THE FACT THAT THANOM COULD NOT RETURN AND STAY IN THE COUNTRY MAY CONVINCE CONSERVATIVES THAT THE OLD REGIME WILL NOT RISE AGAIN AND THEY HAD BETTER GET ON WITH MAKING THE BEST OF A NEW POLITICAL SITUATION IN THAILAND. END SUMMARY.

A. STUDENT UNITY AND OPPORTUNITY FOR POLITICAL ACTIVISTS

1. THANOM'S BRIEF RETURN ENABLED STUDENT ACTIVISTS TO DEMONSTRATE THAT DESPITE THEIR FACTIONALISM OVER THE PAST YEAR, THEY CAN STILL COALESCE AGAINST WHAT THEY PERCIVE IS A MAJOR THREAT FROM THE OLD POLITICAL PROCESS OR ITS KEY PERSONALITIES. IT ALSO CREATED ANOTHER OPPORTUNITY FOR LEFTIST-ORIENTED ACTIVISTS TO TRY TO MANIPULATE STUDENT POWER FOR THEIR OWN ENDS THROUGH THE FORMATION OF THE ANTI-DICTATORSHIP UNION (ADU). THE PEOPLE FOR DEMOCRACY GROUP (PDG) AND THE FEDERATION OF INDEPENDENT STUDENTS OF THAILAND (FIST) APPEAR TO BE THE TWO LEADING ORGANIZATIONS IN THE 23 MEMBER UNION. SEKSAN PRASOETKUN AND HIS MOST RECENT ALLY IN THE LABOR FIELD, THOETPHUM CHAIDI, ARE KEY LEADERS IN THE EIGHT-MAN "CENTRAL COMMITTEE" OF THE ADU.

2. COMMENT: THE ADU BEARS WATCHING. ITS FOUNDERS CLAIM IT IS TO BE A PERMANENT ORGANIZATION. IT COULD SURVIVE BEYOND THE LIFE OF THE CAUSE THAT GAVE IT BIRTH - THANOM'S RETURN AND THE INVESTIGATION OF RETIRED AIR CHIEF MARSHAL BUNCH CHANTHARUBEKSA'S INVOLVEMENT - AND EVENTUALLY EVEN REPLACE THE PDG AND FIST. SEKSAN PRASOETKUN'S APPARENT WILLINGNESS TO BECOME ACTIVELY INVOLVED IN THE ADU'S "CENTRAL COMMITTEE" IS A FACTOR IN FAVOR OF THE POTENTIAL FUTURE VIABILITY OF THIS ORGANIZATION. END COMMENT.

3. WHILE THE RETURN MAY HAVE TEMPORARILY UNITED THE ACTIVISTS, IT EXPOSED EXISTING DIVISION AND WEAKNESSES WITHIN THE STUDENT MOVEMENT, WHICH THE ACTIVISTS ARE TRYING TO MANIPULATE. THE MODERATE NATIONAL STUDENT

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CENTER OF THAILAND (NSCT), FOR EXAMPLE, POINTEDLY DID NOT JOIN THE ADU OR THE DEMONSTRATIONS IT SPONSORED, IT PART BECAUSE OF DISAGREEMENT BETWEEN THE ADU AND THE NSCT ON HOW TO HANDLE THE THANOM AFFAIR.

4. THE NSCT'S NON-PARTICIPATION, HOWEVER, MAY STEM FROM INTERNAL WEAKNESSES, INCLUDING CORRUPTION (BANGKOK 19785), AND, MOST IMPORTANTLY, LACK OF DYNAMIC, SOLIDLY-BASED

LEADERSHIP (BANGKOK 13783). CURRENT WEAKNESSES
NOTWITHSTANDING, THE THANOM RETURN HAS PROVIDED THE NSCT
ITS FIRST OPPORTUNITY TO BEGIN REBUILDING A MORE RESPONSIBLE
IDENTITY OF ITS OWN.

5. THE THANOM RETURN FURTHER AGGRAVATED DIVISION
BETWEEN THE VOCATIONAL STUDENTS AND THE POLITICAL
ACTIVISTS WHOSE CONSTITUENCY IS THE UNIVERSITY STUDENTS.
THE RIGHT-WING "RED GAUR" (WILD BUFFALO) STUDENT GROUP ATTACKED
THE "LEFTISTS" AND SEKSAN PRASOETKUN WITH BOTTLE BOMBS
AT THE 28 DECEMBER 1974 ANTI-THANOM RALLY AT THAMMASAT
UNIVERSITY, CHARGING THAT THE ADU POSITION WAS "ANTI-
DEMOCRATIC". THE ADU REACTED WITH CHARGES THAT COL. SUTSAI
THEPHATSADIN OF THE INTERNAL SECURITY OPERATIONS COMMAND
(ISOC) IS FUNDING THE RED GAUR, AND THAT METROPOLITAN
POLICE COMMISSIONER POL. LT. GEN. NARONG MAHANON HAS
PERMITTED THE RED GAUR TO USE POLICE EQUIPMENT. (COMMENT:
SUTSAI HAS REPORTEDLY ADMITTED PRIVATELY THAT HE DID
SUPPORT THE RED GAUR. "THE NATION" REPORTED JANUARY 3
THAT A RED GAUR LEADER, CHALOEMCHAI MATCHAKLAM, HAD ADMITTED
THAT MEMBERS REFER TO SUTSAI AS "DAD".)

B. POSSIBLE IMPACT ON THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN

6. THE DEMOCRAT PARTY, THE SOCIAL ACTION PARTY, AND
THE NEW FORCE PARTY APPEAR TO STAND THE BEST CHANCE OF
REAPING BENEFITS IN THE FORM OF A FEW ADDITIONAL SEATS IN THE
PARLIAMENT. THE SOCIALIST PARTY OF THAILAND AND THE
DEMOCRAT PARTY WILL BE THE MOST OUTSPOKEN CRITICS OF THE
POLITICIANS FROM THE OLD UNITED THAI PEOPLE'S PARTY (UTPP)
REINCARNATED IN THE SOCIAL JUSTICE, SOCIAL NATIONALIST,
SOCIAL AGRARIAN, AND THAI NATION PARTIES. CONSULATE CHIANG
MAI ALREADY REPORTS THIS TREND IN THE NORTH. THE FOR-
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MER UTPP PARLIAMENTARIANS WILL NOW HAVE TO PRODUCE CONVINCING
EVIDENCE THAT THEY WERE NOT INVOLVED IN THANOM'S RETURN
AND RESOLUTELY OPPOSE THE RETURN OF ANY OF THE SO-CALLED
"TERRIBLE TRIO".

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ACTION EA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 PM-03 H-01 INR-07 L-02 NSAE-00

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7. COMMENT: THOUGH THE THANOM VISIT EXPOSED EXISTING DIVISIONS BETWEEN ACTIVISTS AND STUDENTS, IT MAY HAVE STIMULATED THE ACTIVISTS TO GREATER AND PERHAPS MORE RADICAL EFFORTS TOWARD THE ULTIMATE REMOVAL OF THE REMNANTS OF THE OLD REGIME. THE CURRENT SITUATION IS ALSO AN IDEAL OPPORTUNITY, GIVEN NSCT WEAKNESS, FOR THE LEFTIST-ORIENTED ACTIVISTS TO SOLIDIFY THEIR OWN LEADERSHIP POSITION AMONG THE MYRIAD OF PROTEST AND INTEREST GROUPS CONTINUING TO FORM IN THAILAND. FURTHER RADICALIZATION OF ACTIVISTS AND STUDENTS COULD, HOWEVER, ULTIMATELY CAUSE THE CONSERVATIVES TO TAKE STRONGER COUNTERACTION OF THEIR OWN. IF, HOWEVER, THE NSCT CAN SOLVE ITS OWN INTERNAL PROBLEMS IT MAY BE ABLE TO RESTORE ITS POSITION AS A RALLYING POINT FOR THE MODERATE STUDENT MAJORITY.

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8. THANOM'S BRIEF VISIT IN MANY RESPECTS SERVES AS A LITMUS TEST OF HOW DEEPLY CONCERNED CERTAIN ELEMENTS AMONG THE PEOPLE ARE ABOUT WHETHER THANOM, PRAPHAT, OR NARONG COULD EVER RETURN FOR GOOD. IF IT HAS REKINDLED COMMITMENT AGAINST

THESE THREE FORMER LEADERS AND THE OLD POLITICAL SYSTEM THEY
REPRESENT, IT MAY THEREBY CAUSE MORE OF THEIR
COLLEAGUES STILL IN THAILAND TO DECIDE THAT IT IS BETTER TO
MAKE THE BEST OF THE NEW SITUATION AND TRY TO WORK WITHIN
THE EMERGING POLITICAL PROCESS.
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